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## ABSTRACT

In June 1993, the Quebec Commission d'Evaluation de l'Enseignement Collegial (CEEC) was created to conduct evaluations of the assessment of student achievement and quality of college programs of studies in the province. This report presents, in two parts, CEEC guidelines for evaluating programs of studies. Part 1 describes the CEEC and educational renewal in Quebec, highlighting the legal duties and responsibilities of the Quebec Minister of Education in determining program standards, the colleges in implementing authorized programs, and the CEEC in evaluating institutional policies on program evaluation. Part 2 discusses the CEEC's objectives and methodology in evaluating programs of study and their implementation, describing the following steps in CEEC evaluations: (1) the evaluation guide and criteria will be adapted to each program of studies to be evaluated; (2) using the CEEC guide, each institution will conduct its own evaluation of the program and submit a report to the CEEC; (3) the self-evaluation report will be reviewed and site visits conducted; (4) a preliminary evaluation report will be prepared and distributed to the institution for response and corrections; and (5) a final evaluation report will be prepared. Finally, the criteria for program evaluations are presented, including program relevance, program coherence, the value of teaching methods and student supervision, the appropriateness of resources allocated to educational needs, the effectiveness of the program, and the quality of program management. (BCY)

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**Evaluating  
Programs of Studies**

**General Guidelines**

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General Guidelines

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## Introduction

The Commission d'évaluation de l'enseignement collégial was created by Bill 83, assented to in June 1993.<sup>1</sup> An autonomous, independent body, it is mandated to evaluate, i.e. "rule formally on, how colleges fulfil their academic responsibilities"<sup>2</sup> by evaluating the content and implementation of institutional policies the evaluation of both student achievement and programs of studies.

To conduct its evaluation of college programs, the Commission has defined its evaluation methods and criteria<sup>3</sup> that will serve as the basis of its judgments. It is tense to inform all those interested in the question of evaluation in college education, in particular the colleges themselves, of the methods and criteria it has chosen.

This document, intended mainly for college staff, has a preliminary status. Enriched by the comments of those to whom it is intended, it will be finalized over the coming months.

Herein the Commission presents the general guidelines underlying its approach to program evaluation. The document is divided into two parts: Part One discusses the Commission's mandate and Part Two, its evaluation methods.

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1. *Act respecting the Commission d'évaluation de l'enseignement collégial and amending certain legislative provisions*. Bill 83 (1993, chapter 26).

2. MESS, *Colleges for the 21st Century* (Québec, April 1993), p. 40.

3. The Commission will publish a separate statement of general guidelines for the evaluation of institutional policy on program evaluation (IPPE).

## Part One

### The Commission's Mandate

#### 1. Contributing to the Renewal of College Education

The creation of the Commission d'évaluation de l'enseignement collégial is an important measure contributing to the renewal of college education. It reflects the converging will of the Minister of Education, the colleges, and the vast majority of organizations and associations in college and socioeconomic circles to recognize the importance of college-level institutions in higher education and provide them with the tools they need to develop education at this level. As a result of the renewal, colleges will assume more responsibilities in this regard, and internal and external evaluation mechanisms will become more reliable and effective. Policy and program evaluation should improve the quality of procedures and, ultimately, owing to the critical reflection fostered by the evaluation process, raise the calibre of college education and make it more relevant. As the Commission fulfils its mandate to evaluate institutional policies and the implementation of programs of studies, the value of a college education and the diplomas colleges offer should receive greater recognition.

The Commission will contribute to the renewal of college education by conducting *evaluations aimed at guaranteeing and attesting to the quality of student achievement and programs of studies at this level.*

#### 2. Evaluating Programs of Studies

In evaluating college programs, the Commission will seek to certify their relevance and affirm the quality of their implementation by college-level institutions. In so doing, it hopes to help improve these programs in order to ensure "all Quebecers of access to a **high-calibre, top-quality college education that enables them to attain the highest possible skills standards.**"<sup>4</sup>

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4. MESS, *Colleges for the 21st Century* (Québec, April 1993), p. 19.

The Commission intends to make its program evaluations available to those involved in the college sector and to the public as a whole to enable people to form as accurate an idea as possible of the evolution and quality of college instruction and the results obtained.

### **3. Regulatory Framework**

The regulatory framework for college program evaluation is based primarily on the Act which created the Commission, i.e. the *Act respecting the Commission d'évaluation de l'enseignement collégial and amending certain legislative provisions* (Bill 83). However, in conducting its evaluations, the Commission must also comply with various other statutes, rules and regulations pertaining to the elaboration, implementation and review of college programs. This section will highlight the major provisions governing the activities of the Ministry, the colleges and the Commission itself as stipulated in the *General and Vocational Colleges Act*, the *Act respecting private education*, Bill 83, the *College Education Regulations*, and the decision handed down by the Minister of Higher Education and Science on September 15, 1993.

#### **3.1 The Minister's Duties and Responsibilities**

The Minister is responsible for defining the overall organizational framework for college education, most notably as far as programs of studies are concerned, it determines the objectives and standards for programs leading to a Diploma of College Studies (DEC), and provides the financial resources that are required to implement these programs.

#### **3.2 The Colleges' Duties and Responsibilities**

Colleges have as principal responsibility the implementation of the programs for which they have received the Minister's authorization.<sup>5</sup> These programs lead to a DEC in the pre-university and the technical domains. In subject areas related to technical studies, they may, under certain conditions, design and implement programs leading to an Attestation of College Studies (AEC).

Based on recent amendments to the *General and Vocational Colleges Act*, the academic council is responsible for advising a college's board on any matter concerning programs of studies, in particular on institutional policy on program evaluation, proposals for

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5. *General and Vocational Colleges Act*, s. 6, first paragraph, subparagraph a.

programs of studies and the selection of learning activities that are within the jurisdiction of the college.<sup>6</sup>

Divisions III to V of the *College Education Regulations* refer to programs of studies, defining the colleges' responsibilities in this regard, including those related to the renewal of college education. Colleges must determine which learning activities will make up the general education component specific to each program and the general education component that is complementary to the other components of a program. They must also determine the learning activities of a specific program component of technical studies and at least 50 percent of the specific program component of pre-university studies. In addition, they must adopt and make public a description of the objectives, standards and learning activities for each program offered. After consulting with the academic council, the colleges must adopt and implement an institutional policy on program evaluation (IPPE).

Unlike the procedure applicable to the formulation of an institutional policy on the evaluation of student achievement (IPESA), whose content is determined by specific rules and regulations, the Ministry has entrusted each college with the task of defining the content of its institutional policy on program evaluation.

### **3.3 The Commission's Duties and Responsibilities**

Under chapter II of Bill 83, the Commission is responsible for evaluating the content and implementation of the IPPE adopted by each college, the implementation of programs whose standards and objectives have been set by the Ministry, and the objectives, standards and implementation of programs established by colleges, based on the needs these programs are intended to meet. The Commission may also evaluate the implementation, by all or some of the colleges, of any program of college studies it designates. It may exercise auditing powers in carrying out its mandate.

The Commission is required to make its evaluation reports public in the manner it considers appropriate and may, where necessary, make recommendations to the educational institution concerned and to the Minister.

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6. *Act to amend the General and Vocational Colleges Act and other legislative provisions*, s. 17.01 and 17.02.

#### **4. A Progressive Approach Involving Ongoing College Participation**

Given the importance of its mandate and its desire for constructive action, the Commission favors a progressive approach which takes into account the wide range of experience acquired of colleges in evaluating programs of studies. Both the Commission and the colleges face major challenges. The latter must formulate, adopt and implement an IPPE and methods for conducting their own evaluation of the programs they offer. And, the Commission must evaluate the content and application of these institutional policies and the implementation of programs of studies.

The Commission believes that it should be relevant to evaluate a few programs of studies very soon. This will involve the participation of both the colleges offering the programs and external specialists known for their expertise in the subject areas concerned, and would allow the Commission to test its approach to program evaluation in order to determine whether it is realistic and readily applicable to all types of programs, to make valid judgments on the content and implementation of programs, and to identify major problems and possible causes.

By actively participating in testing the Commission's approach, the colleges would be able broaden their experience in program evaluation while deriving inspiration for the IPPEs they must formulate and adopt.

## **Part Two**

### **The Commission's Approach to Program Evaluation**

#### **1. Objectives**

In evaluating programs, the Commission will seek to ensure that colleges offer high-quality, relevant education. It will also seek to promote recognition for the quality and relevance of college education among all stakeholders, including the students themselves.

The notion of quality is reflected in the relationship between course contents, education process, and results and predetermined objectives which corresponds to needs. The needs are expressed by society, namely by employers, educational institutions, professional associations, students, academic peers, administrators, and financial backers. These expectations affect to numerous aspects of the system and of learning activities within it: the skills and knowledge acquired by graduates, the value of model of teaching, the quality of student supervision and guidance, the coherence of the curriculum, the competence and enthusiasm of the teaching staff, the availability of material resources and support services, the efficiency of management, etc. Quality cannot be defined in unequivocal, absolute terms, since it takes on different meanings depending on the field of study or the type of program under consideration.

The concept of relevance, which coincides with that of quality, refers to the extent to which programs are likely to meet socioeconomic, educational, technical and cultural needs.

Given the fact of the expanded autonomy which has been given to colleges in implementing programs, the Government has clearly expressed its will to counterbalance these new responsibilities with what are intended to be more effective evaluation mechanisms, e.g. the program evaluations conducted by the Commission, which will be made public. The Commission thus intends to play an important role in attesting to the quality of college education.

#### **2. Evaluation Method**

The Commission will evaluate a program or a group of programs leading to a Diploma of College Studies (DEC) by examining how they are implemented in each of the colleges offering them. Generally, it will evaluate programs leading to an Attestation of College

Studies (AEC) on a case-by-case basis, examining not only how they are implemented by the college concerned but also their objectives and standards taking into account the needs these programs are designed to meet. The Commission may adapt its approach to take special circumstances into account.

In conducting its evaluations, the Commission plans to use the means, resources and procedures of evaluation with features inspired by and adapted from those generally found in the area of post-secondary program evaluation. Finally, a report will be prepared at the end of each program evaluation and made public in the manner the Commission considers appropriate.

## **2.1 Features of the Evaluation Process**

The characteristic features of the Commission's evaluation process may be summarized by the following three statements:

- 1) The program evaluations conducted by the Commission will require the participation of both persons involved in implementing programs at the local level, i.e. in the college itself, and external experts.***

Local participation consists of a self-evaluation through questions provided by the Commission. This self-evaluation reinforces in particular the formative character of program evaluation and paves the way for the examination of the program by the Commission.

In calling on the contribution and judgement of persons with known competencies in the domain covered by the evaluation and who do not participate in local implementation of the program, the Commission carries out its external evaluation while ensuring at the same time proper distance and a widening of perspectives. This will enhance the quality, credibility and objectivity of the process as a whole.

- 2) The Commission will exercise its power to make recommendations by suggesting means to improve the quality of education and by evaluating the relevance of programs of studies.***

Following the evaluation of a program of studies, the Commission writes a report on its findings, including recommendations to the college concerned and to the Minister of Education.

The Commission will strive to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of a particular program and suggest ways which will reinforce the strengths or correct the weaknesses identified. If necessary, the Commission counts on the cooperation of colleges to address recommendations to the Minister aimed at making DEC programs more relevant. In borderline cases, the Commission may recommend to the Minister that a DEC program acknowledged to be nonrelevant, owing to outmoded objectives and standards, be withdrawn or that a college no longer be authorized to implement a program unless it can offer minimal guarantees for the quality of collegial teaching.

***3) The Commission will make the results of its program evaluations public.***

The Commission has opted for an approach based on transparency. It plans to disseminate the results of its evaluations in order to testify publicly to the manner in which the colleges concerned fulfil their mandate to offer high-quality instruction.

**2.2 Means and Resources**

The Commission will distribute an evaluation guide identifying the basic data required, evaluation criteria, the norms on which it will base its evaluations as well as a series of questions which are designed to help the institution carry out its own self-evaluation.

Advisory committees will assist the Commission in program evaluations. Each committee will be chaired by a member of the Commission and made up of persons with expertise from the field of teaching, the business world and socioprofessional organizations. The number of members will vary up to a maximum of seven, depending on the number of colleges offering a given program or the number of programs being evaluated at one time. Committee members will be selected from a list drawn up by the Commission following consultation of the socioeconomic and educational organizations concerned.

The Commission may call upon the assistance of experts at any point in its work. They will be invited mainly to sit on one of the advisory committees or to give their opinion on a particular aspect of the program evaluation under way.

### **2.3 The Evaluation Procedure**

The evaluation method envisaged by the Commission includes the following steps:

- 1) With the assistance of the advisory committee, the Commission will adapt the evaluation guide and criteria to each program of studies it intends to examine. It will send the guide, criteria and other pertinent information to those authorized in each of the institutions concerned.
- 2) Each institution will conduct its own program evaluation using the guide provided by the Commission. The institution will submit a self-evaluation report to the Commission along with all other documents it considers relevant. The report must identify the strengths, weaknesses and development potential of each program under review. If it expects to undertake any action, the institution must inform the Commission of this.
- 3) The Commission will study the self-evaluation report submitted by each institution. It will then pursue its evaluation by visiting the college in order to discuss certain aspects with the institution and obtain additional information. The evaluation visits will normally be conducted by three members of the advisory committee, one of whom must also be a member of the Commission.
- 4) The Commission will prepare a preliminary evaluation report for each of the programs and institutions concerned. It will send a copy to the institution to allow the institution to point out any errors or omissions of facts, react to its content, provide explanations, make comments and, if need be, indicate any measures it intends to take in order to improve the situation.
- 5) The Commission will prepare a final evaluation report taking into account the comments submitted by the college.

### **2.4 Reports and Recommendations**

The Commission will prepare two types of reports:

- 1) a program evaluation report for each institution concerned. Its recommendations will be an integral part of this report.

- 2) a program evaluation report summarizing its conclusions for all of the institutions offering the program under consideration. Where needed, it will also adopt recommendations that will be included in this report.

## **2.5 Publication**

The Commission will disseminate its reports as follows:

- 1) It will send a copy of the evaluation report to the institution concerned and to the Minister.
- 2) It will send a copy of the report summarizing its conclusions to each of the institutions concerned and to the Minister.
- 3) It will make these reports public in the manner it considers appropriate.

## **3. Evaluation Criteria**

The Commission has its role to evaluate "the implantation of the programs of studies established by the Minister of Higher Education and Science, taking into account the objectives and standards assigned to them" as well to evaluate "the objectives, standards and implementation of the programs of studies established by the institution taking into account the needs these programs are designed to meet."<sup>7</sup>

In evaluating programs, the Commission will focus on the objectives, resources, teaching methods and results of education. The Commission retains six criteria on which it bases its judgement about the value of a program. Each criterion may be broken down into a set of norms all of which indicate what the Commission considers to be minimal guarantors of a program's relevance and the quality of its implementation.

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7. Ibid., s. 13.

### **3.1 The Relevance of the Program: conformity between objectives, standards and program content and the socioeconomic and socioeducational needs<sup>8</sup>**

- 1) The objectives and standards of a program of studies, as established by the Minister or the institution, are in agreement with society's expectations and needs.
- 2) The objectives, standards and program content take into account, through an ongoing analysis, the needs of the labour market and the graduates which are turned out.
- 3) The objectives, standards and program content take into account, through an ongoing analysis, the expectations of universities, the college graduate access to university, their performance, and their satisfaction with their college studies.
- 4) The objectives and program content are consistent with the college's educational project, the values and general objectives of the institution, including its regional development mission.

### **3.2 The Coherence of the Program: organization of program structure, content and learning activities with respect to the objectives and standards which have been assigned to it**

- 1) The program objectives, as determined by the Minister or the college, clearly describe the competencies that students must acquire, as well as the standards establishing the level to which these competencies must be mastered by college student.
- 2) The program includes a combination of learning activities involving general and specialized education whose specific objectives are clearly defined and consistent with the objectives of the program.
- 3) The content of each learning activity allows program objectives to be achieved.
- 4) Learning activities are ordered in a logical way going from the simplest to the most complex and sequenced in such a way that facilitates the introduction, in-depth study and synthesis of the various objectives.

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8. Note: *The first three criteria do not all apply to the evaluation of programs leading to a DEC. However, without intending to usurp the role of ministerial authorities responsible for evaluating the relevance of these programs, the Commission plans to obtain feedback from the colleges in order to submit, if need be, recommendations to the Minister likely to make these programs even more relevant.*

- 5) Specific requirements for each learning activity (courses, laboratories, individual projects) are realistic and clearly defined; such requirements are accurately reflected in course outlines and the weighting and calculation of credits.

**3.3 The Value of Teaching Methods and Student Supervision: means used to reach the objectives of the program and those of each learning activity**

- 1) Teaching methods are adapted to the objectives of the program and those of each learning activity.
- 2) Teaching methods also take students' characteristics into account in order to help them achieve program and learning activity objectives in accordance with established standards.
- 3) Measures designed to identify learning difficulties as well as guidance, support and follow-up activities enable students to overcome these difficulties.
- 4) Teachers set up their schedule in such a way as to be able to respond to students' questions and needs.
- 5) Teaching methods are reviewed on a regular basis to improve them and keep them up-to-date.

**3.4 The Appropriateness of Human, Material and Financial Resources According to Educational Needs: the quantity and quality of resources allocate to programs by the institution**

- 1) The number and quality of teachers are sufficient and the areas of their expertise are diversified enough to meet the objectives and learning activities of the program.
- 2) The motivation and competence of teachers and other categories of personnel are maintained, among other things, through well-defined evaluation procedures and professional development activities.
- 3) There is a sufficient number of support staff with the qualifications needed to satisfy the needs of the program.

- 4) The quantity and quality of classrooms, equipment and other physical resources are sufficient; their access, maintenance and upgrading norms are in conformity with educational needs.
- 5) Financial resources are sufficient to ensure the proper functioning of the program.

**3.5 The Effectiveness of the Program: results of student learning in relation to targeted objectives and standards taking into account the resources allocated to programs**

- 1) Recruitment, selection and integration measures which allow for the intake of groups of students who are capable of successfully completing the program.
- 2) Specific requirements for each learning activity are effectively respected.
- 3) Graduates meet established standards for the acquisition of the competencies established for the program.
- 4) A sufficient number of students complete the program within the normal time frame, taking in account their status (i.e. part-time or full-time student, average number of credits per student) and their characteristics.
- 5) The success rate in courses is satisfactory and compares favourably with that observed in other programs and institutions.
- 6) The evaluation of student learning conforms to the college's IPESA, whose content and implementation are judged satisfactory by the Commission.

**3.6 The Quality of Program Management: structures and methods of management, organizational context, implementation and evaluation of the program**

- 1) The structures and methods of management as well as the existing means of communication promote the coordination and proper functioning of the program and the "program approach".
- 2) The division of responsibilities for program planning, organization, management and evaluation are clearly defined and fully operational.

- 3) Clear procedures which aid in the regular evaluation, using qualitative and quantitative data, of the strengths and weaknesses of the program and each of its learning activities.
- 4) Program descriptions are only distributed and explained to students and teachers alike.

